

23cr369 ADM/TNL

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

INDICTMENT

v.

(1) NAJI SHARIFI ZINDASHTI,
a/k/a “Big”
a/k/a “Big Guy,”
(2) DAMION PATRICK JOHN RYAN, and
(3) ADAM RICHARD PEARSON,

18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(2)
18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(5)(A)
18 U.S.C. § 924(a)(1)
18 U.S.C. § 1958

Defendants.

THE UNITED STATES GRAND JURY CHARGES:

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

1. From at least December 2020 and continuing until in or around March 2021, the defendants and Co-Conspirator-1 participated in a plot to murder two residents of the State of Maryland. The two targeted residents of Maryland are hereinafter referred to as “Victim-1” and “Victim-2” (hereinafter “the Victims”). Victim 1 defected from Iran and, together with Victim 2, fled to the United States.

2. To plan the murders of the Victims, the defendants and Co-Conspirator-1 used an end-to-end encrypted communication service called “SkyECC”. SkyECC is a service through which customers buy a mobile phone for the exclusive purpose of using the app to send and receive encrypted messages via an anonymous identifier or pin code. Each SkyECC user, including the defendants identified herein, was provided with a unique identifier, or a “handle” which is comprised of a series of capital letters and numbers. The defendants’ and Co-Conspirator-1’s use of SkyECC

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included sharing targeting information with the participants in the plot. This sharing included disseminating photographs of the Victims' faces as well as maps identifying where the Victims could be located. Further, as discussed below, the defendants and Co-Conspirator-1 used SkyECC messaging to recruit personnel to assist in the killings, discuss logistics of the murders, and negotiate payment for expenses associated with the murders.

THE DEFENDANTS

3. NAJI SHARIFI ZINDASHTI, the defendant, is a resident of Iran. ZINDASHTI orchestrated the plot to kill Victim-1 and Victim-2 with the assistance of other persons, both known and unknown to the grand jury. ZINDASHTI communicated with his co-conspirators about this plot using the SkyECC handle XCCJRG.

4. Co-Conspirator-1 is a resident of Iran. Co-Conspirator-1 assisted ZINDASHTI in executing the plot to murder Victim-1 and Victim-2. Through the use of an encrypted messaging device, Co-Conspirator-1 tasked defendant DAMION PATRICK JOHN RYAN with assembling a team of gunmen to travel to Maryland to commit the murders. Co-Conspirator-1 communicated with the co-conspirators using the SkyECC handles 6SN8GO and CUY6A7.

5. RYAN, the defendant, is a resident of Canada and a full-patch member of the outlaw Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. RYAN used the SkyECC handle BE7PK to communicate with ZINDASHTI, Co-Conspirator-1 and ADAM RICHARD PEARSON.

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6. PEARSON, the defendant, is a resident of Canada. While illegally residing in the District of Minnesota and living under an assumed name, PEARSON used the SkyECC handle O0UCIC to communicate with RYAN about the plot to murder the Victims.

THE MURDER PLOT

7. Beginning in or near December 2020 and continuing into January 2021, SkyECC messages show that ZINDASHTI and RYAN communicated with each other about various topics, to include “jobs”, “equipment”, “tools” and “make some money”. In January 2021, SkyECC messages show that ZINDASHTI and RYAN discussed a specific job in the United States. RYAN told ZINDASHTI that although doing a job in the USA was challenging, he “might have someone to do it.” RYAN told ZINDASHTI that “east coast is very hard for me. West I can do more and have more options.” RYAN told ZINDASHTI that he had someone for this job that “was very far away” but this person “would travel.” RYAN then asked ZINDASHTI for “equipment and a car”.

8. That same day, RYAN messaged PEARSON on SkyECC seeking his assistance for a “job” in Maryland. PEARSON told RYAN that he had people he trusted and that “shooting is probably easiest thing for them.” RYAN asked PEARSON how much he would charge while, at the same time, recommending “2 guys go with proper equipment.” PEARSON replied to RYAN, “I’m on it.”

9. After RYAN instructed PEARSON that he needed at least two, and likely three, people, including a driver, PEARSON responded that he may charge over \$100,000 for the job. RYAN replied that he would “get u what u want,” but that he

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needed this “to be over kill lol”. PEARSON then told RYAN that he would encourage his recruits to “shoot [the victim] in the head a lot [to] make example,” and offered that, if the job was time-sensitive, he could do it himself. In a subsequent message, PEARSON told RYAN that he would “make sure i hit this guy in the head with ATLEAST half the clip” and that he would tell his contacts that “we gotta erase his head from his torso”. RYAN responded that the payment would be sent.

10. On or about January 30, 2021, ZINDASHTI’s handle messaged RYAN on SkyECC, asking for an update. RYAN responded that he was getting “things in order” and that he would need money. Within several days, ZINDASHTI’s handle told RYAN that his organization was ready for the plot to move forward. The men agreed on a payment of \$350,000, in addition to \$20,000 to cover travel expenses. Three days later, ZINDASHTI’s handle sent RYAN a message containing one of the two known SkyECC handles for Co-Conspirator-1. Minutes later, RYAN greeted Co-Conspirator-1, telling him “*We have a 4 man team ready*”.

11. In the following days, a series of messages were exchanged between RYAN and Co-Conspirator-1 to facilitate payment for the murders. RYAN asked for information about the targets, to include their identities and their specific location. Co-Conspirator-1 sent RYAN photographs of a man (Victim-1) and a woman (Victim-2) as well as images of two maps, each highlighting the same known address for Victim-1 and Victim-2 in the State of Maryland. When RYAN told Co-Conspirator-1 that two targets would cost more than one, Co-Conspirator-1 assured RYAN that this was not a problem.

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12. In or around March 8, 2021, Co-Conspirator-1 provided RYAN with a phone number and instructed RYAN to call. Co-Conspirator-1 told RYAN to "say that, 20000\$ i have to bring from you". In March of 2021, Co-Conspirator-1 facilitated a \$20,000 payment to RYAN for the purpose of covering travel expenses associated with the plot to murder the victims.

COUNT 1

(Conspiracy To Use Interstate Commerce Facilities in the Commission of Murder-For-Hire)

13. The allegations in paragraphs 1 through 12 of the Indictment are incorporated herein.

14. From at least in or about December 2020 through in or about March 2021, in the State and District of Minnesota, and elsewhere, the defendants,

NAJI SHARIFI ZINDASHTI, a/k/a Big, Big Guy,
DAMION PATRICK JOHN RYAN, and
ADAM RICHARD PEARSON,

and others known and unknown to the Grand Jury, did knowingly and intentionally conspire to use a facility of interstate commerce, to wit: the SkyECC encrypted messaging service, with intent that the murders of Victim-1 and Victim-2 be committed in violation of the laws of Maryland and the United States as consideration for the receipt of, and as consideration for a promise and agreement to pay anything of pecuniary value, to wit: cash, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1958.

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COUNT 2

(Possession of a Firearm by a Fugitive From Justice)

15. On or about July 26, 2021, in the State and District of Minnesota, the defendant,

ADAM RICHARD PEARSON,

knowingly being a fugitive from justice, did knowingly possess, in and affecting interstate commerce, a firearm, that is, a Taurus G2c 9mm handgun, serial number TLT84443, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(2) and 924(a)(1).

COUNT 3

(Possession of a Firearm by an Alien Unlawfully in the United States)

16. On or about July 26, 2021, in the State and District of Minnesota, the defendant,

ADAM RICHARD PEARSON,

being an alien illegally or unlawfully in the United States, and knowing he was an alien illegally and unlawfully in the United States, did knowingly possess, in and affecting interstate commerce, a firearm, that is, a Taurus G2c 9mm handgun, serial number TLT84443, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(5)(A) and 924(a)(1).

FORFEITURE ALLEGATIONS

The allegations contained in Counts 1-3 of this Indictment are hereby realleged and incorporated by reference for the purpose of alleging forfeitures pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 981(a)(1)(G), Title 18, United States Code, Section

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981(a)(1)(C), Title 18, United States Code, Section 924(d)(1) and Title 28, United States Code, Section 2461(c).

Each defendant convicted of any offense in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1958, as alleged in Count 1, shall forfeit to the United States, pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 981(a)(1)(C), all property, real or personal, which constitutes or is derived from proceeds traceable to the violations.

Each defendant convicted of any of Counts 1-3 shall forfeit to the United States, pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 924(d)(1) and Title 28, United States Code, Section 2461(c), any firearms, ammunition, and accessories involved in or used in the commission of any of Counts 1-3, including, but not limited to a Taurus G2c 9mm handgun, serial number TLT84443, and all ammunition and accessories seized therewith.

If any of the above-described property is unavailable for forfeiture, the United States intends to seek the forfeiture of substitute property as provided for in Title 21, United States Code, Section 853(p), as incorporated by Title 28, United States Code, Section 2461(c).

A TRUE BILL

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

FOREPERSON